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EFFECTS OF FAMILY BACKGROUND ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF PUPILS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN HWANGE DISTRICT OF MATABELELAND NORTH PROVINCE IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Educationists generally believe that children's academic performance is a result of both school-based and home-based factors. The current study sought to explore the effects of family background on the academic performance of pupils in selected secondary schools with special reference to Hwange district of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. The qualitative research approach and the case study design were utilized to accomplish the study; where the case of two selected schools was used. The population of the study comprised of form four secondary school pupils and their parents. The sample of the study was 20 pupils (N=20) and 10 parents (N=10). The interview guide was used as the research instrument to gather data, while the researchers complemented as the other research instrument in harmony with qualitative studies. The major findings of the study were that the family structure, economic situation and the parents' level of education had an impact on children's academic performance. Accordingly, the study concluded that family background has a direct or indirect effect on children's academic performance and attainment. The study mainly recommended that families should create a conducive environment and provide children with the necessary educational needs if children are to perform high at school. In addition, adult literacy education should be introduced to parents without an education to help them appreciate the importance of education and as well motivate them to support their children's education. More boarder research relating to how home-based factors affect children's academic performance need to be conducted in future in order to provide educationists a holistic picture.

Key words: Family, family background, Academic performance, education, socialization.

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Academic performance is the major concern of educational institutions and secondary schools in Hwange District in Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe are no exception. The whole idea of their establishment is to impart

knowledge and skills to learners of which good academic performance is expected of these learners. arrant (2005) notes that since the dawn of the school age, academic performance is increasingly being recognized as a measure of achievement that is used by educational institutions and all parents wish their children to perform well in school and to be successful. Bell (2012), notes that parents devote a lot of resources and commitment to their children's education because they believe that their attainment of good results guarantees a stable their stable future and life success.

There are various factors that are considered as important in as far as they influence academic performance in school pupils and according to Etsey (2005), these factors are either home-based or school-based. School based factors include lack of qualified teachers, lack of educational facilities large enough to comfortably accommodate students and also shortage of enough education resources like text books and exercise books which help in the learning process of children while home-based factors are centered on family background and include parents' occupation, economic status, their educational level and the family structure (Muthoni, 2013).

Thus, a child's family background cannot be left out when discussing issues that affect learners 'academic performance. Fundamentally, a family is expected to provide food, shelter, a sense of integrity and belonging, love affection and to provide proper educational support to the children in the family. Olanyika (2004) asserts that the family is the bedrock of any society; hence, the academic performance of learners from different families says a lot about the family that they come from. Thus, while there are several factors that influence learners' academic performance, family background is certainly one of these key factors.

Education not only gives insight but also grooms the child, adds knowledge and gives skill to the child. The importance of education cannot be over emphasized as it is a basic tool used by society for the transmission of its societal values. Education is a fundamental human right and public good which is important for the accomplishment of individual and societal developmental goals. As noted by UNESCO (2008), education has the task to reinforce its role of service to society, especially activities aimed at reducing poverty, violence, illiteracy among others. The indispensable role of education warrants the need to interrogate some of the factors that influence learners' academic performance in order to espouse how such factors may be cultivated for the promotion of effective education for its direct beneficiaries and society in general.

It is against this backdrop that the current study sought to explore the effect family background on the academic performance of pupils at selected Secondary Schools in Hwange District of Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe.

1.1 Statement of the problem

It is not clear why pupils from different families enrolled in selected secondary schools in Hwange District are performing badly as far as their academic work is concerned. The problem at hand is whether or not family background has an effect on the academic performance of pupils at selected secondary schools in Hwange District, hence, the current study's motivation to bring forth insights on how family background affects the academic performance of the learners.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the effects of family background on the academic performance of pupils in selected secondary schools. The research was guided by the following objectives:

- To find out how a family's economic situation impacts on the academic performance of learners
- To determine if family structure has an influence on the academic performance of learners
- To explore the link between parent's educational level and the academic performance of learners.

1.3 Delimitation and Significance of the Study

Geographically, the study was confined to Hwange District which is one of the seven districts in Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. The researchers mainly focused on form four students learning at Jabulani and Chidobe Secondary Schools. Conceptually, the study focused on the effects of family background on the academic performance of pupils in the two selected secondary schools. The importance of the current study was premised on the fact that it was anticipated that its findings would reveal the salient and concealed effects of family background on the academic performance of secondary school pupils.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Haralambos and Holborn (2005), family background is embedded in the socialization framework of any society. Accordingly, the current study which focuses on how the academic performance of secondary school

pupils is affected by family background is informed by the socialization theory. Socialization is generally defined as “the process by which children acquire the knowledge, values, norms and skills necessary to perform as functioning members of the society (Chao,2000:78). The study emanates from the socialization theory which was propounded by Horton Cooley (1929) cited in Rousseau (2002). Cooley’s socialization theory states that people learn who they are through interacting and disseminating norms, customs and ideologies providing an individual with skills and habits that are necessary for participating in one’s society.

For Colley (ibid), socialization is the most influential learning process one can ever experience in his or her early life. Socialization is also viewed as how individuals learn the rules, practices and values needed to participate successfully in their culture and society (Harkness, 2006; Brinkerhoff and Crosby, 2012).It involves individuals learning consciously and unconsciously from the people who surround them, particularly the significant others.

Notable, the family is the first place where the children learn to become human and as noted by Haralambos and Holborn (2000); it plays an important role in children in as far as socialization is concerned. For them, the family transmits the culture of the society to the children. In the same vein, Mohanty (2005) notes that the first relationship that children form is with their parents, guardians and/or caregivers. In a family, children learn basic characteristic of being human in terms of a particular society. The family is said to socialize children also the ethics; knowing the difference between right and wrong and also to relate in the most appropriate way with others. The child does not only learn these norms and values of society but also internalizes them and make them part of their day to day lifestyle.

Chinyoka (2012) carried out a research on the impact of parents’ economic status, particularly how home nutrition impacted on the academic performance of learners in Zimbabwe. The sample comprised of twelve grade seven learners, three headmasters and four teachers in Masvingo Province. The findings revealed that malnutrition affected physical growth, cognitive development and consequently impacts on the academic performance of learners. This study revealed that if learners do not eat healthy food, their performance at school will be below standard. Chinyoka and Naidu (2013) then conducted a research on the impact of poverty in general on the academic performance of form three learners in the same province. The research concluded that poverty affects children across multiple contexts including family, home, neighborhood and school.

Jakachira (2013) undertook a study on the impact of child-headed households on academic performance of primary school children in Beatrice resettlement area in Zimbabwe. The sample comprised of fifteen primary

school students, twelve heads of schools, eighty-four teachers, community leaders and neighbors. The conclusions of the study were that there are numerous factors that are unfavourable to high academic performance; such as, large households, lack of adult guidance and counseling and lack of parental encouragement which all negatively impacts on academic performance. Thus, the study looked at a situation where the parents are not there and the elder children are the ones who will be taking care of the younger ones, thereby concluding that the academic performance of children from child-headed family is largely negatively affected.

In a related study conducted by Turkeret, al (2003) the findings were that children who grow up in single-parent families do worse on measures of scholastic achievement, educational attainment and economic success. The bottom line observed was that single parenthood usually reduces the quantity and quality of parental time with children; a case observed in situations where either the mother or father is absent in the home. The study concluded that this may translate into limited socialization, less supervision and monitoring and less parental involvement and emotional support. This is in harmony with a study conducted by Rushton and Mclanahan (2012) which found out that children's educational attainment depended largely on parental inputs including time, food resources and money; also coupled parental educational level.

Ushie (2012) conducted a research on the influence of parents' level of education and general knowledge on academic performance in Lagos State in Nigeria. The sample comprised of one hundred and fourteen students from five schools. The findings were that whether children were educated or not or their level of education to a large extent determined students' academic performance. The study found out those learners whose parents have higher levels of educational attainment and had subsequently better jobs performed better at school than children whose parents had no or low educational levels. In the same vein, children who were exposed to more educational and cultural resources at home tended to have higher levels of literacy performance at school which propelled them to perform better in overall school learning tasks.

More generally, Muthoni (2013) conducted a study on the impact of general family background on the academic performance of secondary school students in Mbeere District in Kenya. The study revealed that single parenthood, usually, has a negative impact on the academic performance of students. It also concluded that parents 'level of academic achievement had a direct relationship with their children's academic success. Parents with high educational standards often had their children performing highly in a variety of school learning tasks including linguistic and mathematical achievement. In the same regard, Osuofor (2003) and Chowa (2013) conducted studies on how home factors influence academic performance of students in Ghana. The conclusions

made were that factors such as family structure and parents' economic situation had a significant effect on the academic performance of students though school characteristics such as learning materials and the quality of teachers also impacted on the academic performance of the students.

The foregoing review of related literature reveals that there are certain home-based factors which have a direct or indirect impact on the academic performance of learners. As the different studies focused on learners at different educational levels and in different school contexts, the researchers found it necessary to delve into the effects of family background on the academic performance of pupils in selected secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design

The current study adopted the qualitative research approach which Bryman (2008) views as a strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in data collection and analysis, and is also interpretive and naturalistic in nature (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). The study employed the case study research design which is a design best suited for gaining an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon within its cultural, social and situational context without imposing pre-existing expectations (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). In this study, the case studies were Jabulani and Chidobe secondary schools.

Population and Sample

The population considered for this study were form four pupils at the two selected secondary schools in Hwange district of Matabeleland North province in Zimbabwe. Tuckman (2004) views research population as the group of elements which the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions from. The sample for the study were twenty pupils (N=20) which was drawn in equal proportion from the two schools. To complement this sample, a sample of ten (N=10) parents was also considered. A sample according to Bless and Higson-Smith (2010) is a set of the whole population which is being investigated by the researcher.

The participants of this research were selected using purposive sampling. Schut (2009) defines purposive sampling as a non-probability procedure in which the researchers purposely chooses participants who are relevant to the research topic. Thus, the researchers chose ten students from Chidobe and ten students from Jabulani Secondary Schools. In addition, the researchers chose two teachers from each school. The sample of the research

was based on the researcher's judgment and the purpose of the research such as form four students who are mature enough to give required information.

Research Instruments, Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers used Interviews as the main research instruments for data collection and these were utilized for both pupils and parents. Consistent with qualitative studies, the researchers were also part of the instrument machinery in the gathering of data (Creswell, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2008) notes that an interview consists of guidelines on pertinent issues to be discussed and their use enabled the respondents who were the teachers to disclose their thoughts, feelings as well as their perceptions regarding the effect of family background on secondary school pupils' academic performance.

Thus, the researchers collected data using the interview guides for pupils and parents which gave them a fairly holistic picture of the problem under study. Unstructured questions were used for both pupils and the parents in order to accomplish the interviews. Data were analysed qualitatively, with interview data being interpreted as per the questions of the interview guides.

4.0 STUDY FINDINGS

A total of 20 children were to be interviewed and out of these 17 were actually interviewed; thereby giving a response rate of 85%. The researchers were also interested with the demographic information of the students, and from the data collected (8) 47% were girls and (9) 53% were boys. Data collected on the ages of the students showed that (5) 29% were in the 14-15 years age group, (10) 60% were aged 16-17 years and (2) 11% were in the 18-19 years bracket.

The students were also asked to indicate the distance they walk from home to school. The data obtained showed (8) 47% walk 1-2 kilometers, (4) 24% walk for 3-4 kilometers, (2) 11% cover 5-6 kilometers, (2) 11% walk 7-8 kilometers and (1) 6% walk 9-10 kilometers. Generally, most of the students are fairly closer to their schools, with only one student living more than 8 kilometers from school. Researchers were interested in the distance the students walk to school with the general assumption that those who walk long distances will be tired when they arrive at school which can negatively impact on their study concentration and in turn indirectly affect their academic performance.

The teachers' bio-data showed that those who were interviewed were two females and two males. The four teachers chosen to be in the sample were the most senior teachers at the school and the data presented showed that (3)75% of them were aged between 20 -30 years while (1) 25% was aged between 31–40 years. On academic qualifications of teachers, the findings indicated that of the four teachers,(3)75% of them were holders of Diplomas in Education while (1)25% was had a Post –Graduate Diploma in Education.

Data collected showed that (10) 59% students are from extended family, (4) 23% are raised by a single parent, (2) 12% are raised in the nuclear family and (1) 6% is from a child headed family. The researcher observed that a large number of the children come from extended families, and to some extent from a single-parent family. Study results showed that such children led a different lifestyle from those in a nuclear family as they were more likely not to get attention from parents as they will be many of them in the family or there is only one parent in the home. One of the male students had this to say;

I come from an extended family and we are fifteen in our family. We have to share five rooms that are there and I cannot do my homework or study at home because my cousins and I have to share a room and half the time it will be noisy, hence I can hardly concentrate. So I will just wait until I get to school where I will do my homework but there will not be enough time as I have to attend to lessons.

Thus, because the student is from an extended family and there are many of them, it becomes difficult for the student to concentrate and, therefore, he is likely to perform poorly because he does not have quality time and space for homework assigned by the school. Children from extended and single-parent families may also lack proper socialization as their attention by parents is likely to be limited as compared to children from nuclear families. Even in cases where there is a guardian or care-giver, these may be in fear of giving the children proper rules and discipline in fear of what people might say. So when these children come to school, already they are affected negatively, hence, when they engage in classroom tasks, it becomes difficult for them to learn properly and are likely to perform badly. In some instances, the guardian in the extended family may give more attention to his or her biological children helping them with homework and monitoring their school work discriminately.

One form four boy who stays with a guardian indicated that;

I stay with my uncle and sometimes I have to miss school because I have to herd cattle If my uncle is not around, he usually says that I should miss school and herd cattle as well as take care

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of the home .When I come to school, I would have missed on so many lessons and teachers will not repeat what they would have taught others in my absence. My uncle will not allow his own children to herd cattle during school days but I as he says that I am older. When my uncle travel, it is usually not less than two days and that means I miss school for more than two days and at the end of the term, I do not score good marks.

The attributes in most extended families where children are under the care of guardians are that every member of the family has to contribute something to the upkeep of the family. In this case, herding cattle and taking care of the home was one of them. A student who misses school for whatever reason will be behind in his or her school work and, therefore, he or she will perform poorly in class.

Parents were asked on the effects of family structure on the academic performance of children. One parent, who was a care giver in an extended family when asked if she helps the children with their homework, had this to say;

Most of these children are my brothers' and sisters' children and I also have my own children. I do not have the time to teach them or help them all to do their homework as I have to go out and look for money so that I can be able to put some food on the table. If they are not going to be serious with their school work, there is nothing that I can do.

This showed that there isn't proper attention in an extended family, and where it is to some extent, it will only be given to the children who have their parents at home. Those who are extended family members are left without anyone to help with their homework assigned at school as long as they have food on the table.

There are pupils who also come from single parent families and their academic performance is also affected by the family structure. In an interview held with one parent who is a single mother; when asked if she helps her children with their school work and if she assists the teachers pertaining her children's school work, she said;

I am not working and I do not have a husband. I have to take care of my children on my own. One dropped out of school because I could not manage to pay her school fees while the other one is doing form four. I do not know where I will get the money to register for her final year examinations this year. I usually do some menial jobs in farms, but the money is not enough. Sometimes I leave my children on their own so that I work in order to get money to provide them with school material and it worries them so much.

Children who are raised by single parents may also lack proper socialization as the parents seem to be away from home most of the time so that they look for money for the upkeep of the family. In this case, the mother or father who is the only parent available has to provide shelter, food and all that is needed by the children including educational needs.

The absence of a father or mother in a family makes it difficult for the one available because he or she has to assume both duties of a mother and a father. The strain felt by one parent in raising the children may also be transferred unconsciously to the children as well and there are chances that the academic performance of these children becomes poor. More often, the only one parent is not able to provide enough educational materials including school fees, let alone helping the children with their school work at home as the parent will be busy looking for food and other basic needs for her children. When children from such a family come to school, they are generally disturbed and do not concentrate in their school work, which consequently affects their academic performance.

The researchers also observed that children from single-parent families are generally stressed because of the situation at home. In a situation where the parent is not employed, they will be worried if their mother or father will be able to find a piece job to make their next meal available. These students' school work is negatively affected and they often perform poorly as compared to children coming from nuclear families. In this study, it was also discovered that students who come from child-headed families perform poorly as this type of family lacks adult guidance, counseling, protection, encouragement and socialization which enhance academic performance.

The researchers also looked at how the socio-economic situation of the parents affected the pupils' academic performance. Data collected showed that most of the parents who were interviewed were unemployed. In this regard, (6) 60% of the parents were unemployed, (3) 30% were formally employed while (1) 10% indicated that they were self-employed. In an interview done with one parent, when asked if she pays school fees for her child and provides all the materials needed at school, she had this to say;

I do not have a job, I used to be working but now my life has become tough and my husband is also not working .We rely on farming but we do not harvest much to help us improve our financial status .We do not have enough money to pay for our child's school fees and cannot provide him with material that is needed at school. We just have hope that we will find some money for him to

register at least two subjects this year but we are pained by the knowledge that our child's performance at school is negatively affected.

The family's socio –economic situation, therefore has an influence on the academic performance of students. The financial status of the families in form of properties and possessions also affect the academic performance of students. Some of them come from homes where there are no proper houses which may affect the students in the sense that their self – esteem is destroyed and they are not motivated to work hard in schools.

Data collected also showed the impact of the parents' level of education on children's academic performance. A large number of parents interviewed went only up to primary education. In this regard, (7) 70% were educated up to primary level and (3) 30% did secondary education up to form 2. As argued by Muthoni (2013), parents who are educated understand the importance of education in the lives of their children, hence; promote their children's educational attainment and success. Parents with a reasonable level of education encourage their children to study hard so that they may score good marks at the end of their studies. Also, educated parents raise their children to perceive education highly which enhances their performance at school. Students whose parents are educated enjoy learning as they have full support from their parents and their parents even help them with their studies leading to them performing better than the students whose parents are not educated.

In an interview with one of the parents, the researchers asked the parents if they help their children with homework, if they look at their children's books to see how they are doing as far as their learning is concerned, one mother simply said;

Ah! , I do not help the children with their homework; I know nothing about what they learn. I am not educated myself for I did not go to school.

Interviews done with other parents who did not go school showed that they also did not help their children with their school work because they are not educated. These parents did not even attend school consultations with teachers on what the children learn and how they learn or may be assisted to improve.

However, Gould (1993) notes that parents who are educated ensure availability of conducive learning environments at home in terms of provision of books, study rooms, discipline and assistance with assignments. When it comes to gender issues, the parents will give both girls and boys equal opportunities to acquire education. Students whose parents are educated live in homes that provide a stimulating learning environment where they

are encouraged to study and are supplied with relevant resources and such children stand better chances of good performance. Hence, students with educated parents will perform better as compared to students whose parents are not educated. The poor performance of students is seen from the way the students participate in class. If the students are given some homework, their performance will show that they have not been helped at all. The whole idea of giving students work to do at home is to give them free will to consult their textbooks or even their parents. It was therefore established in this study that the parent's educational background significantly affected the academic performance of students.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above findings, the researchers concluded that students from extended families tend to lack space for reading and that some of their family sizes are too big. Under such circumstances the students lack conducive environment to do their studies. Economic problems in these families also affect the students' social life, thereby negatively affecting their studies as well. The students' academic performance may be determined by the socio – economic situation at home. This is so because, if a pupil does not have proper school uniform, stationery needed for their learning; this negatively affects their schooling as noted with most of the students who were interviewed. The students' academic performance can be explained by the level of their parents' education as parents with higher education tend to see the importance of their children's education and put their best efforts in providing all that is needed by their children so as to have a better education. On the other hand, parents with lower educational levels may see education itself as a waste of time and allow their children to go to school just for the sake of going to school.

More specifically, the study concluded that:

- Socio–economic challenges in a home have a negative impact on the academic performance of students. Students will be deprived of their right to good nutrition, education and stationery which helps them acquire quality education
- The fact that most of the students do not stay with both or all of their parents makes them face difficulties in terms of space and proper socialization. The absence of biological parents and proper family set-up has a negative impact on the academic performance of students. Students who come from the nuclear type of families as compared to extended or single-parent families perform much better in class as they will be provided with the full support and most of the materials needed for their education

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- Parents' level of education has an impact on the students' academic performance. If parents are not educated, they may not help their children with school work because they are not familiar with concepts taught in schools. Parents who are educated are likely to be able to help their children with their homework and they will provide what their children need to perform highly at school.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and conclusions, the study recommended that:

- Families should provide their children with conducive and proper environments for them to be able to do their school work.
- Parents should have a source of income or other economic provisions for their children to access the necessary educational materials which will help them to attain better academic achievement.
- The government should introduce adult education to parents who have no education which will help them appreciate the importance of education; thereby leading them to see the importance of their children's education as well as the need to support it
- The community, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should help the vulnerable and the underprivileged students in their respective areas of educational need in order to enhance their academic performance and achievement
- Further research is recommended with regards the need to explore how other home-based factors other than the family structure, economic situation and parents' level of education have an impact on children's academic performance. Such a broad study will give a holistic picture of how family background or home-based factors in general have an effect on children's academic performance at different levels of the school system.

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